1973

Mrs. Josephine Taylor

Becky Pruitt

INTERVIEWED: Mrs. Josephine Taylor

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Q: Are you originally from Savann?

a; Oh, yes.

q; Was your family for Savannah?

a; yes, my father, grandfather, greatfather, all the way back to the original settlers.

q; Can you just give me some idea of what it was like to grow up in Savannah?

A: Well, it was just grand. Thats the only thibg I can tell you. Because, of course, you all don't have it like we used to have it. Going to Tybee on the train, going to Isle of Hope on the trollry, and all that kind of stuff. You just couldn't possibly have it as good as we used to have it.

Q: Since your family has been in Savannah for so long, did they feel th t they had a position to uphold?

Well, maybe they did, but I didn't. I just refused to bother with it. I think that each and every person has to live for themselves. Don't you? I do.

Q: What kind of work did your father do?

A: He was a vice-president of a railroad.

Q: Did that affect your life? Was the railroad important in Savannah?

A: oh, yes. Central? It always has.

Q: Where in Savannah did you live? Always here?

A: No, we built this place in 1936. We lived on, well, the first place we lived was on 31st Street. When th t was the west side of town, it was THE place to live. And then we moved to 41st Street.

Q: Why did you move?

A: Well,we lived in an apartment and we built a house on 41st Street and then went to 43th Street because mother thought we needed a bigger place.

Q: How many people in your family?

A: Just four. Me, Sister, mother and father.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Well, I started off at Henry Street and transferred to Barnard, then to Massey, left Massey and went to Waters Ave., thaere to 35th Street and there to Savannah High School. I got the rounds.

Q: Did you ever go to college?

A: No.

Q: Why not?

A: Well, I was going and Sister got married and ran off, so I went to work to be frank with you.

Q: When you were a teenager, or say in your early twenties, what kind of social life did you have?

A: Well, we'd go down to Tybee on the train. You had to catch the 12 o'clock train back. If you missed the train you would have to spend the night on the beach. But you had a gorgeous time. Then after the road was built we'd go down there. They had big name bands here— like Goodman and Steel Blue, on the Ty-Breezer Pavillion.

Q: Were there dances and such?

A: Well, they don't have anything now like they did. I can't remember all of them that they did. They were just wonderful. It was the big bands in all the country. They'd come down and stay a week or two and then move on. And we'd go on picnics and go skating. Where the new Savanah High is today, one time they had built a hotel which burnt, so we used to get up a big crowd at the church and go skating and then go over to someones house for hot chocolate.

Q: Was there a certain group that you ran with?

A: No, kind of a mixed crowd. Savannah mixed more then than it does now. People are group consgious. By that I mean, you go with a group, that was it. But when I came along, some of my best friends were Jews and Catholics and I'm

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Protestant. It didn't make any differnce. Well, not as far as that was concerned.

Q: Did you have any contact with the black community?

A: To be sure. And we loved them dearly. All of them that worked around with the house. We came into contact with one down here on this place (the caretaker) has been here 27 years. And before him, we had another. Somebody has been here since we built this place.

Q: Why did your family build this house on the river? To get away from the city?

A: Well, momma just wanted a place on the water and she and daddy couldn't make up their minds. She wanted to move to Wilmington Island and Daddy didn't. So they found this place and came out here.

Q: How did your family get around?

A: Cars weren't prevelent, but we had one of the first here. But we went on street cars. Or if you came out here, then they had to use a horse and buggy.

Q: You said that you worked right out of high school. Wheere?

A: I worked at the City Hall.

Q: Was it hard for a woman to work back then?

A: No, many of my friends were working. I went to work back then to go back to school. I was gonna go to school and we found that Sister was married in Febuarary and I suppose to go to college the next fall. I got out of school in January. Thats when we graduated and daddy told me that I could work til then. So I went to work and started making money, that was good money, and I didn't have anything to do with it but spend with it and I wouldn't quit to go back to school. I wish I had.

Q: What did you do down at City Hall?

A: I worked for the Tax Assessors Office. Mr. E.R. Banks at the time. Then when Mr. Gordon Sausey was the mayor he made up his mind he was gonna make a secretary out of me and he made me go to stenographers school and then he would call me to come upstairs and take dictation from him. And we'd fight all the time. We did! I adored him.

He was a lovely man. But we'd fight.

Do you remember the Depression?

A: Yes, I guess so. I was married and had a child. Yes, I remember it especially well.

Q: What was it like in Savanna? Was it as hard as people say it was?

A: It was unimaginable. When I got married, I married a man who was making $80 a month. And out of that we had to rent an apartment. We couldn't afford a telephone. We didn't have an automobile. We couldn't afford one. We did everything ourselves. Your own washing, ironing. And then after Bill was born it was the same thing, we had gotten a raise, but it was still hard. Bill was born in 1933 and that was the year Roosevelt got in and straightened out the banks and things started pulling up from then.

Q: Back to the beach, it must have been more developed then than it is now?

A: The beach was very wide. The Ty-Brezzer was down there and the Hotel Tybee was down there. It faced the beach. And in between the Hotel Ty-Breezer was the Durden Powers Hotel. They also had dances. The Ty-Breezer, and this is almost unbelievale knowing the beach today, but the Ty-Breezer Pavillion went out to the water and you could go out to the Pavillion and they had big tables up there and when you would get off the bus in the morning your parents would tell you to scoot on down and save a table. And you'd stake out a table ad set up the picnic and go on down to the Pavillion. And it had rocking chairs. And the front of the Pavillion there was steps that must have been tenty feet wide and they went down to the water. And it was way out beyond the pavillion. That shows you how much the beach has eroded. Now from the time I was a child and the days when the bands came to the beach, the steps were gone. And you could dance there on the Pavillion and hear the water under your feet. And the Central of Georgia owned the Pavillion. They ran a railroad down there. From Randolph and East Broad and it was the only way to get to the beach before the road. But it used to stop at Fort Screven, during the First World War, there were troops stationed there, and it stopped one more time before it reached the South End of the beach. I can remember that where Butler Avenue is now there must have been five blocks of houses going out to the ocean. They all blew off one winter. Thats no stoy darling, that had such heavy tides one winter that when the people got there the houses were gone.

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Q: When you lived on 31st Street, where was the city limits?

A: Well, I was too young on 31st Street to know where the city limits were. When we moved to 41st Street, Victory Drive was the city limits. It was known as Estell Avenue at tht time. It wasn't until after the war that they renamed it and planted the palms. We used to go across there to have a picnic because it was nothing but woods. Its unbelievable but its true. Development went wild. They just built and built. Savannah lost a lot of the squarres at this time until after they started redevelopment again. If you notice, beyond Victory Drive when they started building again the squares start again. I don't remember who it was. I think that it was Mr. Willy Robertson, head of the Park and Tree Commission at the time and I believe that it was him who started the squares again. If you remember, there are some squares all around down Abercorn Street. They had automobiles races on Victory Drive. Dr. Julian Quattlebaum, Sr. used to race there. He gave daddy a book about those races that he autographed himself.

Q: When the big bands came, where did they play? Did Savannah have clubs or what?

A: The only time I remember them is when they came to the beach, I don't remember them coming to Savannah. They would go to the beach all summer. There wasn't any place in Savannah for them to come. The only bands I remembeer in Savannah were the bands on Sunday afternoon at the Forsyth Park. I remember that as a child. They used to play concerts in the park on Sunday afternoon. Daddy and mother would take us there after church.

Q: I saw some pictures of the old City Market. That must have been very nice?

A: Oh, Becky, you just can't imagine. You would go in there and it would just be stall after stall of the most gorgeous fruit and vegetables that you have ever seen. You could buy anything. I remember, when I was working at the City Hall, I used to walk over there on my lunch hour. There was an old colored woman who I'd buy peanuts from. I would buy a pound and take them back to work with me. They were the best things. You could buy shrimp, crab, collards, turnips, anything. They had to quit because it got in such bad condition. They said that rats had taken over the basements. They could have fixed it, but people fought

it. Those Negroes were wonderful. They looked like Aunt Jemimas. They carried these baskets on their heads. The baskets were about two inches deep and very big around and they carried them around on thier heads. They walked through the streets with shrimp, squash, or whatever. There was this old man who had a wagon. He had built bins on both sides of the wagon and he would fill these bins with fresth fruits and vegetables and sweet potatoes and he and his horse would come around and sell the wares. And housewives would come at their homes with their pans and just buy the fruits like that.

Q: Do you think that people were happier?

Oh, I think so. You made your own happiness. I didn't have all those things that the kids have today. Usually, if you wanted to play dolls, you had one doll. And we made yourownpaper dolls. It was more fun to make the paper dolls than it was playing with them. Same thing is true of kites. We would always fight over the brown paper for the kites, because it was scarce. We would play half rubber. That was invented in Savannah, you know? We would play out in the streets until after dark. And we would skate in the streets. It was more dangerous but it was fun. There were always big skating parties. I was in the Service League at church and we'd have skating parties. And ride bikes.

Q: Were there any good restaurants or night spots in Savannah that you and your friends went to?

A: Well, we would always go to the pictures on the weekends and stop by on the way at Jerry Georg's and buy candy. You just couldn't go to the show without some candy. Then there was NUnnleys on Bull Street. On Saturdays afternoon, if you had a nickle for car fare, you would catch the streetcar downtown and then walk up and down until you saw a friend and then you would go and get a coke at NUnnleys. We'd go everwhere as a family. Church, picnics. I wish you could have interviewed my father. He would have been the one for this. He was a good story teller. He was a love. He could have told us about the tidal wave out on Black Island. Its just so different. Thats why I like it out here. When you turn off Whitebluff Road on my road, its like going back one hundred years. That is an old road. They said something about paving it, but I won't

let them touch it.

Q: Haven't I heard it somewhere that your father was on the County Commission?

A: Yes, he was chairman on the County Commission. He was first a city alderman, and then the Commission and finally the chairman of the County Commission.

Q: Were those positions, aldermen and commission, elected positions or were they appointed?

Q: What was it like campaigning in Savannah?

A: I wouldn't campaign. I just refused to do anything like that.

Were the elections important then? Did people get excited over them?

A: Oh,yes, more than they do now a days. It wasn't as much mud slinging as there is today. You understand. In those days people in town ran because they were interested. The best people in SAvannah ran for public office. Mr. Gordon Saussy was the mayor. John Stevens was an alderman, Mr. Grimsh w was on the County Commission. They were the nicest people in Savannah. They were all from the high class. Do you get what I'm trying to say, Mr. Grimshaw and the rest were in private business. So it wasn't as though they needed work. Daddy was in private business and they payed him twenty dollars a month to be the county commission chairman. It was gratus pay, because, well, they met every week. It was an honor to serve in public office in Savannah. I don't think that people realized that. They were just men sincerely and devotedly working for the community.

Q: Did the community itself have very much community spirit?

A: No, we always fought among ourselves. And we always fought the state. That was one reason why Savannah never grew any more than it did. Too much internal divisions. The people always fought the ones in office and always complained about the job they were doing. All my life Savannah was known for disagreeing with the rest of the state. It was called the "state of Chatham." No matter what went on, Savannah was different from the rest of the state.

Why, for example, during Prohibition, Savannah just went wild. What with rum runners and gangsters and all. It was wide open down here.

Q: What was Prohibition like down here?

A: I was very small, but I can remember my daddy saying that the town was being taken over by rum runners and gangsters. OH, this is a funny story. When I was small, and we were living on 41st Street, I was the only girl on the block. There was one more girl who lived a few streets over and we always had to play with the boys. Well, kinda diagonally across the street, I remember that a young couple, nice looking, built a beautiful house. It was just gorgeous. And I'll never forget that the lady had a mink coat and even the boys were impressed. Anyway, the man drove a yellow Cadillac and his drove one of those low, white European sports cars. And we would go over there and talk and all, and momma and daddy would get mad every time we did. And we would get a switching every time we did. The man would take us for rides in his car and they rented horses to ride and would bring them out to the house and let us kids ride them. But momma and daddy were very adamant that we stay away from them. They never would say why, but come to find out years later, they were gangsters.

Q: Did you ever consider living anywhere else?

A: I did. When I got married we moved to Greensboro, N.C. I liked Greensboro, but I love Savannah. Its home. Savannah is like an old shoe. The longer you wear it, the better it fits. We had gorgeous times growing up in Savannah. Thinking back over it, I wonder what the kids today do for fun. We used to build tree houses. We'd steal tea or tea from the grocery. And our fathers didn't buy already made tree house, we made them. And our doll houses were egg crates. And go to the high school football game on Thanksgiving between Benedictine and Savannah High. Oh, that was the game. It was an awful rivalry. I remember that one family here in Savannah had one son who played for Benedictine and one who played for Savannah and they both played football and in every game they would just hit each other across the line. And the stadium was always packed.

Everyone went and I don't mean just me or you or whoever, but the whole family. We'd eat dinner and then be ready to go for the game. They don't have that anymore. Then eventually they did away with the games because people just lost interest in the games.

Q: What were the schools llike? What was the disipline codes like?

A: Well, they were allowed to hit us, you know? It was fun going tothe old Savannah High School. It was three stories and we'd getup on the third floor and look around and if no one was coming we'd slide down the banisters. I remember one day I had to try it and I slid right into Miss K.C. Grace. I'll never forget that. She was an English and history teacher. Short and shs nice as she could be juststrict, nd she tolerated no foolishness. Oh, and we'd skip school and walk home through the woods or such. And we had the school yard, see, Chatham Junior High School was on the back of Drayton Street side, nd Savannah High School was on the Bull and Oglethorpe side and there was a yard inside, and that was the only place the kids had to go for recess. And I remember very vividly when women first started to smoke in public. There was a bunch of them and Mr. George Ball was the teacher down there and he used to call one od them the "Lucky Strike Queen" and the Chesterfield Queen and all that. Everytime they would walk in the room he would say something about the Lucky Strike and Chesterfild Queens. They would go down in the furnace room because girls weren't supose to smoke in those days. And the football team was fun and we all wentto class together and I don't know, it was just fun.

Q: Do you like the changes that Savannah has undergone in your lifetime?

A: Well, its really not fair me to say. Savannah has more do now than it ever did when I was coming up. Many army people are coming back here to retire, because they like the more leisurely way of life that Savannah has.I guess its for the better, but , well, everything is I suppose, but we had more fun as children thtn kids do today. We used to have taffy pull parites. Ever have a taffy pull party? See? What you do is this.You really never made syrup candy? Oh, Lord, you've missed the best part

part of life.You have to flour and butter your hands and then get the saty t certa nstage and start pullin it between your hands nd then you would pass it to some ne else nd they would pull it d this would go on nd the candy would bec me just s white s the napkin nd was very brittle And then you would chew it. nd you would h ave a marvelous time. You kids tdday don't know wh t you are missing. Life was so much more uno mplicated back then. People were happier because they m ke their own happiness.